

On the heels of the first winter storm of the season, Vermont's congressional delegation – Sens. Patrick Leahy, Bernie Sanders and Rep. Peter Welch – today announced the immediate release over \$11 million in heating assistance to eligible Vermonters.

The funds will provide assistance through the Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP). With continued uncertainty over the final FY2012 funding levels for LIHEAP, Leahy, Sanders and Welch have pushed in recent weeks for the funds to be released immediately so states have the opportunity to help those with greatest needs now.

Leahy said, "Winter is setting in early across Vermont this year, and this initial infusion of heating aid is welcome, but it will not be enough. We are working on several tracks to press for adequate heating assistance for this season, and we are pointing out as forcefully as we can that time, and funding, are running short."

Sanders said, "The federal home heating assistance funding that the administration released will help tens of thousands of senior citizens, families with children, and persons with disabilities stay warm this winter. While I am glad that the president is finally releasing this funding, much more must be done. Last year Vermont received \$26 million in LIHEAP funding. Today, only \$11 million in LIHEAP funding is being released. With poverty increasing and heating oil prices skyrocketing, significantly cutting LIHEAP would cause a severe winter health emergency. We cannot let that happen. The administration's proposal to cut LIHEAP in half and the House Republican plan to cut more than \$1 billion in LIHEAP funding are both unacceptable. I will do everything I can to make sure that LIHEAP is level-funded and that no-one in Vermont goes cold this winter."

Welch said, "With over a foot of snow blanketing some parts of the state, the immediate release of this money is welcome news. Energy assistance is a critical lifeline for countless Vermonters, even in the best of times. While this news should give peace of mind to those who can't afford their fuel bills, it is a down payment on what Vermont will need to meet the demand this winter. We'll continue fighting to ensure LIHEAP is fully funded and available for those who need it when they need it."

While LIHEAP funding for FY2012 remains uncertain, rising fuel prices are likely to increase the numbers of Vermonters requiring assistance.

The Department of Energy's (DOE) Energy Information Agency projects average household heating expenditures will reach record highs this winter, with predicted increases of three percent for natural gas, seven percent for propane, and eight percent for heating oil. The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association anticipates 9.4 million households will seek assistance with their energy costs through the LIHEAP program this winter, up from 8.9 million last year.

In FY2011, Vermont received \$25.6 million in LIHEAP funds, providing assistance to 27,000 Vermonters.